

THE GREAT POT AND THE TWENTY LOAVES

NO. 3187

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MARCH 3, 1910
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“Set on the great pot.”
2 Kings 4:38

“Then bring meal.”
2 Kings 4:41

“Give unto the people, that they may eat.”
2 Kings 4:42

WE scarcely need go over the story. There was a dearth in the land, Elisha came to the college of the prophets, which consisted of about a hundred brethren, and found that they were in want, as the result of the famine. While he was teaching the young men, he observed that they looked as if they needed food, and he found that there was none in the house. Elisha, therefore, ordered his servant to take the great pot, which generally stood upon long legs over the fire, and make a nourishing soup in it. True, there was nothing to put in this pot, but he believed that God would provide. It was for him to set the pot over the fire, and it was for the Lord to fill it.

Some of the young men were not so sure as Elisha was that God could fill it without their help, and one, with great eagerness, went out to gather something from the fields, his help turned out to be of small service, for he brought home poisonous cucumbers, cut them up, and threw them into the broth, and lo, when they began to pour it out, it was acrid to the taste, gave them a terrible colic, and made them cry out, “There is death in the pot.”

Then the prophet said, “Bring meal.” This was put into the steaming caldron, the poison was neutralized, the food was made wholesome, and the students were satisfied. This miracle was in due time followed up by another. A day or two afterwards, the young prophets were still needing food, and the larder was again empty. Just at that time, a devout man comes from a little distance, bringing a present for the prophet, which consisted of a score of loaves similar to our penny rolls.

The prophet bids his servitor set this slender quantity before the college. He is astonished at the command to feed a hundred hungry men with so little, but he is obedient to it, and while he is obeying, the little food is multiplied, so that the hundred men eat and are perfectly satisfied, and there is some left.

I believe there are lessons to be learned from these two miracles, and I shall try to bring out these lessons in three forms. First, as they shall relate to *the present condition of religion in our land*, secondly, as they may be made to relate to *the condition of backsliders*, and thirdly, as they may afford comfortable direction to *seeking sinners*.

I. First, then, our text, as in a parable, sets forth in a figure our course of action in connection with **RELIGION IN THIS LAND**.

And first, there is a great need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have not a hundred men famishing nowadays, but hundreds of thousands, and even hundreds of millions in this great world who are perishing for want of heavenly food. *The church must feed the people*. It is not for us to say, “We hope they will be saved,” and leave it there, or set it down as a work that cannot be done till the millennium and therefore we have nothing to do with it. Our business is, in the strength of God, to grapple with the

present condition of things. Here are the millions famishing, shall we let them perish? I remember seeing similar sentences under the likeness of the late Richard Knill, "The heathen are perishing! Shall we let them perish?" "But," says one, "how can we possibly supply them with food?" See what Elisha did, the people were hungry, and there was no food in hand, except a little meal, yet he said, "Set on the great pot." Faith always does as much as she can, if she cannot fill the pot, she can put it on the fire, at any rate. If she cannot find meat for the pottage, she pours in the water, lights the fire, and prays and waits. Some have not this faith nowadays, and until we have it, we cannot expect the blessing.

Thus saith the Lord, "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitation." Why? Because "Thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left." Few will regard such a summons as this. The feeble faith of our time finds it difficult to enlarge the tent even after the increase has come, and the people are there to fill it. Great faith would enlarge the tent, and expect the Lord to keep His promise, and multiply us with men as with a flock.

The church of God greatly needs, not foolish confidence in herself, which would lead her to be Quixotic, but simple confidence in God, which would enable her to be apostolic, for she would go forth believing that God would be with her, and great things would be accomplished by her. She would open her mouth wide, expecting that God would fill it, and fill it He would. Faith does what she can, and waits for her Lord to do what *He* can. Brother, what is your faith doing? Are you putting the great pot on the fire in expectation of a blessing?

"Set on the great pot," said the prophet, "*and seethe pottage.*" He was not in jest, he meant what he said. Often, when we get as far as setting on the pot, it is not for seething pottage. We feel the desire to carry out spiritual work, but we do not come to practical action as those who work for immediate results. Oh, for practical common sense in connection with Christianity! Oh, for reality in connection with the idea of faith! When a man goes to his business to make money, he goes there with all his wits about him, but frequently when men come to prayer and Christian service, they leave their minds behind, and do not act as if they were transacting real business with God.

Elisha, when he said, "Set on the great pot," expected God to fill it, he was sure it would be so, and he waited in all patience till dinner was ready. O church of God, set on the pot, and the great pot too! Say, "The Lord will bless us." Get your granary cleaned out, that the Lord may fill it with His good corn. Put the grist into the hopper, and look for the wind to turn the sails of the mill.

O ye doubters, throw up the windows, that the fresh breeze of the divine Spirit may blow in on your sickly faces! Expect that God is about to send the manna, and have your omers ready. We shall see greater things than these if we awake to our duty and our privilege. It is the church's business to feed the world with spiritual bread, she can only do so by faith, and she ought to act in faith in reference to it. The faith of Elisha was not shared by all the brethren. There were some who must go and fill the pot, as we have said, but they gathered the gourds of the colocynth vine, and poisoned the whole mess, and it became needful to find an antidote for the poison.

We here see our second duty, *the church must provide an antidote for the heresies and poisonous doctrines of the time.* There has entered into the public ministry of this country a deadly poison. We may say of the church in general, "O thou man of God, there is death in the pot!" Zealous persons, whose zeal for God is not according to knowledge, have gone about and gathered the gourds of the wild vine.

I think I could tell you what kind of gourds they are, some of them are very pretty to look at, and they grow best on the seven hills of Rome, they are called "Ritualistic performances," these they shred into the pot. There are gourds of another kind, very delicate and dainty in appearance, which are known as "liberal views" or "modern thought."

As a philosopher once talked of extracting sunbeams from cucumbers, so the wild gourds are said to consist of "sweetness and light," but the light is darkness and the sweetness is deadly. They have shred these into the pot, and nobody can taste the doctrinal mixture which is served out from some pulpits without serious risk of soul-poisoning, for "there is death in the pot."

What Scriptural doctrine is there which men do not deny and yet call themselves Christians? What truth is there which our fathers held which is endorsed by those who think themselves the leaders of advanced thought? Have they not polluted the entire sanctuary of truth and lifted up their axes against all the carved work of the temple?

On the other hand, have we not, almost everywhere, Christ put aside for the crucifix and the blessed Spirit thrust into a corner by the so-called sacraments? Is not the outward made to drown the inward and is not the precious truth of the Gospel overlaid by the falsehoods of Rome?

There is death in the pot, how is the church to meet it? I believe it is to imitate Elisha. We need not attempt to get the wild gourds out of the pot, they are cut too small, and are too cunningly mixed up, they have entered too closely into the whole mass of teaching to be removed. Who shall extract the leaven from the leavened loaf? What then? We must look to God for help, and use the means indicated here. *“Bring meal.”*

Good wholesome food was cast into the poisonous stuff, and by God’s gracious working it killed the poison, and the church must cast the blessed Gospel of the grace of God into the poisoned pottage, and false doctrine will not be able to destroy men’s souls as it now does. We shall not do much good by disputing, and denouncing, and refusing to associate with people. I call such things *barking*, but preaching the Gospel is *biting*.

The surest remedy for false doctrine is preaching the truth. Christianity is the cure for Popery. Preach up Christ, and down go the priests, preach grace, and there is an end of masses. I am more and more persuaded that the good old Calvinistic truths, which are now kept in the background, are the great Krupp guns with which we shall blow to pieces the heresies of the day, if once more they are plainly and persistently preached in harmony with the rest of revealed truth.

Is the remedy very simple? Do not, therefore, despise it. God be thanked that it is simple, for then we shall not be tempted to give the glory to man’s wit and wisdom when the good result is achieved. In this work, you can all help, for if only meal is needed, a child may bring his little handful. One man may contribute more than another, but the humblest may put in his pinch of meal, and even the commonest servitor in the house may assist in this work.

Spread the Gospel. Spread the Gospel. Spread the Gospel. A society for prosecuting Puseyites, will that do the work? Appeals to Parliament, will they be effectual? Let those who choose to do so cry to lawyers and Parliaments, but as for us, we will preach the Gospel. If I could speak with a voice of thunder, I would say to those friends who are for adopting other means to stop the spread of error, “You waste your time and strength, give all your efforts to the preaching of the Gospel. Lift up Christ, and lay the sinner low. Proclaim justification by faith, the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, and the grand old doctrines of the Reformation, and your work will be done, but by no other means.” “Bring meal,” said the prophet, and our word at this time is, “Preach the truth as it is in Jesus.”

Some of the grossest errors of our own day may yet be overruled by God for the promotion of His truth. There are men who believe in Sacramentalism, who love the Lord Jesus very ardently. When I read some of the poetry of this school, I cannot but rejoice to see that the writers love my Lord and Master, and it strikes me that if the whole Gospel could be put before them, we might expect to see some of them become noble preachers of the truth, and perhaps, save the orthodox from dead dry doctrinalism by reviving a more direct devotion to the Savior. Perhaps they will not, with us, talk often of justification by faith, but if they extol the merit of the precious blood and wounds of Jesus, it will come to much the same thing. For my part, I care little for the phraseology, if essential truths be really taught, and the Lord Jesus be exalted.

Some of the doubters too, “thinkers,” as they prefer to be called, if the Lord renewed them by His Spirit, might bring out the old truths with greater freshness than our more conservative minds are able to do. I love to hear those who have known the vanity of error speak out the truth. They are more sympathetic towards the tempted, and are generally more conversant with the grounds of our faith.

Who knows? Who knows? I have a hope which may not prove a dream. I hope that thousands are feeling their way into light, and will come forth soon. Let us not despair, but keep to our work, which is Gospel preaching, telling about Jesus and His dear love, the power of His blood, the prevalence of His plea, and the glory of His throne, and who knows but that a multitude of the priests may believe, and the philosophers also may become babes in Christ's school? "Bring meal," and thus meet the poison with the antidote.

Another lesson comes from the second miracle, let us look at it. The loaves brought to Elisha were not quatern loaves like ours, but either mere wafers of meal which had been laid flat on a hot stone, and so baked, or else small rolls of bread. The store was but little, yet Elisha said, "Feed the people," and they were fed. That is the third lesson, *the church is to use all she has, and trust in God to multiply her strength.*

Nowadays, individuals are apt to think they may leave matters to Societies, but this is highly injurious, we should every one go forth to work for God, and use our own talents, be they few or many. Societies are not meant to enable us to shirk our personal duty under the idea that our strength is small. Little churches are apt to think that they cannot do much, and therefore they do not expect a great blessing. What can these few cakes do towards feeding a hundred men? They forget that God can multiply them. You limit the Holy One of Israel. Do you think He needs our numbers? Do you think He is dependent upon human strength? I tell you, our weakness is a better weapon for God than our strength.

The church in the apostolic times was poor, and mostly made up of unlearned and ignorant men, but she was filled with power. What name that would have been famous in ordinary history do you find among her first members? Yet that humble church of fishermen and common people shook the world. The church nowadays is for the most part too strong, too wise, too self-dependent, to do much. Oh, that she were more God-reliant! Even those whom you call great preachers will be great evils if you trust to them. This I know, we ought never to complain of weakness, or poverty, or lack of prestige, but should consecrate to God what we have.

"Oh, but I can scarcely read a chapter!" Well, read that chapter to God's glory. You who cannot say more than half a dozen words to others, say that little in the power of the Spirit. If you cannot do more than write a letter to a friend about his soul, or give away a tract to a stranger in the streets, do it in God's name. Brother, sister, do what you can, and in doing this, God will strangely multiply your power to do good, and cause great results to flow from small beginnings. Active faith is needed, and if this be richly present, the Lord in whom we trust will do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask, or even think.

II. And now, briefly, but very earnestly, I desire to speak TO BACKSLIDERS.

In all our churches there are members who are no better than they should be. It is very questionable whether they ought to be allowed to be members at all, they have gone very far back from what they used to be, or ought to be. They scarcely ever join the people of God in public prayer, though they once professed to be very devout. Private prayer is neglected and family prayer given up.

Is it not so with some to whom I address myself? Have you not lost the light of God's countenance, and gone far away from happy communion with Christ? It is not for me to charge you, let your own consciences speak. I hope that you are now beginning to feel an inward hunger, and to perceive that your backslidings have brought famine to you.

What shall I bid you do? Go and attempt your own restoration by the works of the law? By no means, I bid you *bring your emptiness to Christ, and look for His fullness.* Yours is a great empty pot, set it on the fire, and cry to God to fill it. Jesus says to lukewarm Laodicea, "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him." "Alas!" says the Laodicean, "I have nothing in the house." Your confession is true, but when our Lord comes to sup, He brings His supper with Him. He stands at the door of every backslider and knocks. Will you let Him in? "Oh!" you say, "I wish He would enter."

Dear brother, open your heart now, just as you did at the first, when as a poor sinner you went to Him. Say to him, "Blessed Lord, there is nothing in me but emptiness, but here is the guest chamber. Come in all Your love, and sup with me, and let me sup with You. I am nothing, come and be my all in all."

"But," says the backslider "may I really come to Jesus, just as I did at the first?" Listen! "Return, ye backsliding children, for I am married unto you, saith the Lord." He is married to you, and though you have behaved badly, the marriage bond is not broken. Where is the bill of divorce which He has sued out? Is it not written, "He hateth putting away"? Come just as you are, and begin anew, for He will accept you again.

"But," say you, "alas for me, I have been gathering wild gourds!" What have you been doing, professor? You have left undone what you ought to have done, and you have done many things you ought not to have done, and therefore there is no health in you. You have been trying to find pleasure in the world, and you have found wild vines. You have been tempted by love of music, love of mirth, love of show, and you have gathered wild gourds, a lap full, almost a heart full. You have been shredding death into the pot, and now you cannot feel as you used to feel, the poison is stupefying your soul.

While we were singing just now, you said, "I want to sing as saints do, but there is no praise in me." When you meet with a man who is mighty in prayer, you say, "Alas, I used to pray like that, but my power is gone," the poison is paralyzing you. If you are a worldling, and not God's child, you can live on that which would poison a Christian, but if you are a child of God, you will cry out, "O thou man of God, there is death in the pot!"

Some of you have become rich, and have fallen into worldly fashionable habits, these are the colocynth cucumbers. Others of you are poor, and necessarily work with ungodly men, and perhaps their example has lowered the tone of your spirit, and led you into their ways. If you love this condition, I grieve for you, but if you loathe it, I trust you are a child of God, notwithstanding your state.

What are you to do who have in any way fallen? Why, *receive afresh the soul-saving Gospel*. "Bring meal"—simple, nourishing, Gospel truth, and cast it into the poisoned pottage. Begin anew with Jesus Christ, as you did at first, say to Him, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "Repent and do thy first works." Do you not recollect the period when first your eyes lighted on His cross, and you stood there burdened and heavy laden, fearing that you would sink to hell, until you read in His dear wounds that your sin was put away? There you found peace as you saw your transgressions laid on Jesus, and removed from you. Oh, how you loved Him!

Come, brother, let us go tonight again to the cross, and begin to love Him again. That will cure you of the world's personal influences, and bring back the old feelings, the old joys, the old loves, and take the death out of the pot. Backslider, you need now exactly what you needed at first, namely, faith in Jesus. Come repenting, come believing, to the Savior, and He will remove the ills which the gourds of earth's wild vines have brought upon you.

"Ah!" say some of you, "we can understand how the Lord Jesus can fill our emptiness, and heal our soul's sicknesses, but how shall we continue in the right way? Our past experience has taught us our weakness, we are afraid that even the great pot will only last us for a little while, and then our souls will famish."

Then remember the other part of our text, in which we read that when the few loaves, and the ears of corn in the husks, were brought to Elisha, the Lord multiplied them. Though you may have very little grace, that grace shall be increased. "He giveth more grace." We receive grace for grace, daily grace for daily need. Between this and heaven you will want a heaven full of grace, and you will have it. No one knows what draughts you will make upon the sacred exchequer of the King of kings, but His treasury will not be exhausted. "Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."

III. Our third and last word is TO THE SEEKING SINNER.

Many of you, I trust, desire salvation. The subject before us has much comfort in it for you. You are hungering and thirsting after Christ, but have not yet found peace in Him. You lament your own emptiness of all that is good. Then, poor soul, do just what the prophet bade his servant do, "set on the great pot," that is, confess your emptiness unto the Lord. Tell the Lord what a sinner you are.

I know not whether the story be true of Mr. Rowland Hill's leading the landlord of an inn to pray. Mr. Hill would have family prayer wherever he stayed, and if this was refused, he would order out his horses, and go on. On one occasion, he is reported to have asked the landlord to act as priest in his own house, but the man replied, "I can't pray, I never prayed in my life." However, after a while, Mr. Hill had him on his knees, and when the man said, "I cannot pray," Mr. Hill cried out, "Tell the Lord so, and ask Him to help you." The man exclaimed, "O God, I can't pray, teach me." "That will do," said Mr. Hill, "you have begun."

Whatever your state is tonight, if you desire salvation, go and tell the Lord your condition. Say, "Lord, I have a hard heart, soften it." If you cannot feel, tell Him so, and ask Him to make you feel. Begin at the root of the matter, set on the great pot, empty as it is. Be honest with the Most High, reveal to Him what He so well knows, but what you so little know, the evil of your heart, and your great necessity. If you cannot come *with* a broken heart, come *for* a broken heart. If you cannot come with anything good, the mercy is that nothing good is needed as a preparation for coming to Christ. Come just as you are. Do not wait to fill the pot, but set it on to be filled.

Do I hear you reply, "Ah, you don't know who I am, I have lived many years in sin"? Yes, I know you, you are the young man that found the wild vine, and went and gathered of its gourds a lapful—a horrible lapful. Some of you rebellious sinners have ruined yourselves, body and soul, and perhaps in estate as well, by your sins. We hear of people sowing their wild oats, that is a bad business. They had better never do it, for the reaping of those wild oats is terrible work. You have poisoned your life, man, with those wild gourds.

Can the pottage of your life be made wholesome again? Yes, *you* cannot do it with your own efforts, but "bring meal," and it will be done. If you believe on the Lord Jesus, He will be the antidote to deadly habits of sin. If you will simply trust in Him who bled for you, the tendency of your soul to sin shall be overcome, the poison which now boils in your veins shall be expelled, and your soul shall escape as a bird out of the snare of the fowler. Your flesh upon you, in a spiritual sense, shall become fresher than a little child's. Though you are full of the poison, till every vein is ready to burst with it, the great Physician will give you an antidote which shall at once and forever meet your case. Will you not try it? Incline your ear, and come unto Him; hear, and your soul shall live. May God put the meal of the Gospel into the pot tonight!

"Ah!" say you, "but if I were now pardoned, how should I hold on? I have made a hundred promises and always broken them, I have resolved scores of times, but my resolutions have never come to anything." Ah, poor heart, that is when you have the saving of yourself, but when God has the saving of you, it will be another matter. When we begin to save ourselves, we very soon come to a disastrous shipwreck, but when God, the eternal Lover of the souls of men, puts His hand to salvation work, and Jesus puts forth the hand once fastened to the cross, there are no failures then.

I have tried to preach a very simple sermon, and to say some earnest things, but it is likely that I may have missed the mark with some, and therefore I will again draw the Gospel bow in the name of the Lord Jesus. O Lord, direct the arrow! If God will bring souls to Jesus, I will bless His name throughout eternity.

Poor lost souls, do you know the way of salvation, do you know how simple it is? Do you know the love of God to such poor souls as you are, and yet do you refuse to attend to it? Do you know that He does not exact any hard conditions of you, but He points to His Son on the cross and says, "Look"? Can it be that you will not look? Does Jesus die to save, and do you think it is not worth your while to think about salvation? What is the matter with you? Surely you must be mad.

When I look back on my own neglect of Christ till I was fifteen years old, it seems like a delirious dream, and when I think of some of you who are thirty or forty, and yet have never thought about your souls, what can be invented to excuse you? I see some of you with bald heads, or with the snow of wintry age lying upon them, and you have not yet considered the world to come, I would say to you, "Men, are ye mad?" Why, you are worse than mad, for if you were insane, you would be excused. Alas, the madness of sin has responsibility connected with it, and therefore it is the worst of all insanities. I pray you, by the living God, you unsaved ones, turn unto the Savior tonight. Whether you are saved or lost cannot so much matter to me as it will to you.

If I faithfully beseech you to look to Jesus, I shall be clear, even if you reject the warning, but for your own sakes, I beseech you to turn to Jesus. By death, which may be so near to you; by judgment, which is certain to you all; by the terrors of hell, by the thunderbolts of execution, by eternity, and better still, by the sweets of Jesus' love, by the charms of His matchless beauty, by the grace which He is prepared to give, by the heaven whose gates of pearl are glistening before the eye of faith, by the sea of glass unruffled by a single wave of trouble, where you shall stand forever blest if you believe in Jesus, by the Lord Himself, I entreat you, seek Him at once, while He may be found. May His Holy Spirit lead you so to do! Amen and Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

2 KINGS 4:1-37

Verse 1. *Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.*

According to the very cruel custom of those times, if a man were in debt, and had no means of payment, his children were sold for slaves. Here was a poor widow, whose husband had been one of the sons of the prophets, but he had died in debt. He was evidently one who was known to Elisha as a faithful, God-fearing man, and perhaps that partly accounted for his poverty. The false priests were fed at Jezebel's table, but because this man worshipped JEHOVAH, the one living and true God, he had probably been persecuted and hunted down until he had lost what little he formerly had, and therefore, when he died, he could leave his wife no other legacy than that of debt, and in consequence, the creditor came to seize her two sons to be bondmen.

2. *And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not anything in the house, save a pot of oil.*

They used oil extensively in the preparation of their food as well as for lighting their dwellings. This woman was so poor that she had no meal in the house, but she had a little oil. When our Lord was about to feed the five thousand, He asked His disciples, "How many loaves have ye?" so here the prophet asked the poor woman, "What hast thou in the house?" and she told him she had only "a pot of oil."

3. *Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few.* [See sermon #2063, The Filling of Empty Vessels].

Evidently the poor woman's credit was good though her debts were heavy, her neighbors knew she would have paid her creditor if she could, so they were willing to grant her request though they probably wondered why she wanted so many empty vessels.

4-7. *And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed.* [See sermon #1467-The Oil and the Vessels]. *Then she came and told the man of God.*

As it was through obeying his directions she had miraculously obtained this large supply of oil, she would not make use of it without further counsel from the man of God who had already given her such good advice.

7. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt,—

“That is thy first duty, ‘pay thy debt,’”—

7-8. And live thou and thy children of the rest. And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.

The prophet had helped a poor woman, now a rich woman helps him. God sometimes pays His servants in kind very speedily for anything they have done for those who belong to Him, at other times, He puts it to the credit of their account.

9-13. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?

God's servants must not be ungrateful for any kindness that is shown to them. If they receive hospitality, they must be ready to give a return of such things as they have. Elisha was willing to do anything in his power for this hospitable Shunammite, so he said to her, “Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?”

13. And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.

She had no desire for earthly greatness, and she was very wise, for usually, happiness is to be found in that middle state which Agur desired when he said, “Give me neither poverty nor riches.” This Shunammite had no wish to be removed to the trying and perilous atmosphere of the court or the army, so she answered, “I dwell among mine own people.”

14-19. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaiden. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life. And the child grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head.

The sun had been too hot for the child, sunstroke had seized him.

19-20. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died.

How transient are all our earthly treasures! The child was well, and ill, and dead in the course of a few hours. Hold with a loose hand all things earthly. Make not your gourds into gods, for they will soon wither and die. Very often, we destroy our own comforts by thinking too much of them. As soon as we make anything that we have into an idol, it will be broken in pieces, or taken from us, or in some way turned into a curse to us.

See how this good woman acted when she had suffered this great sorrow.

21-22. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, That I may run to the man of God, and come again.

She did not tell him her errand, she wished to keep the trouble to herself for a while.

23. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him today? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath.

“It is not the ordinary time for going to the prophet.”

23. And she said, (Salem, that is, Peace, or as we read it), It shall be well.

She must have been a woman of great faith. She checked her natural emotions, and believed in God that all would be for the best. "It shall be well."

24-26. *Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee. So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite: run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well.*

It is heroic faith when we can feel that if the child shall die, it is well, if this husband shall die, it is well, and if we ourselves shall die, all is well, for He who has the arranging of all that concerns us cannot arrange otherwise than well. Alas that often, our rebellious spirit says, with poor old Jacob, "All these things are against me," but true faith sits humbly down at the feet of the great Disposer of all events and says, "He hath done all things well."

27. *And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet:*

As if she feared lest he should go away before she had poured into his ears the story of her grief.

27. *But Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.*

Those ancient prophets of God had only limited knowledge. The Spirit of God taught them some things, but not all things, so Elisha was made to feel that he was but man, even though the Spirit of God often spake through him.

28. *Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?*

Then he learned what her trouble was, and understood that the child was dead. Before she had said as much as that, he read the news in the tones of her voice.

29-30. *Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way; if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.*

She did not believe in Gehazi, nor yet in the staff, and herein she was a wise woman. God would not bless the prophet's staff to the child's restoration, lest relic worship should spring up amongst the Israelites, or lest they should begin to attach some value to outward signs.

30-34. *And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him and told him, saying, The child is not awaked. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.*

See the power of prayer, the very gates of death are made to open when Elisha, a man of like passions with ourselves, bows before the Lord in prayer.

Learn a lesson also from Elisha's attitude toward the dead child, for often God is pleased to give spiritual life through the power of human sympathy. When we put ourselves into the condition of the sinner, hope for him, pray for him, agonize for him in broken hearted sympathy on his account, putting ourselves as far as we can into his place, God often makes us the instruments by which His Spirit quickens the dead in sin.

35-37. *Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times [See sermon #1461, The Seven Sneezes], and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.*

Her heart was too full for speech just then, so she took up her son, and went out.

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